



# Lifelong Learning Networks

Newsletter November 2008

**Professor Colin Mellors,**

Chair of National Forum Steering Committee



## Welcome to the latest edition of the LLN National Forum Newsletter

The last few months have been busy for the LLN community, especially as some of the earlier networks decide how they intend to carry their work forward after the end of initial HEFCE funding.

It is clear from the work that the Forum has been doing recently in collecting data and case studies just how much has been achieved by LLNs in supporting the progression of vocational learners. This is reflected not only in the introduction of new programmes and pathways, stronger progression protocols, and more supportive IAG but also in the real attitude changes inside institutions that make for a better understanding of learners who might not have travelled the more usual routes into higher education. This 'championing' of internal change has been one of the real achievements of LLNs and, hopefully, will be one of their most durable legacies.

Developments in the FHE landscape - increasing emphasis on skills and employer-engagement alongside the emergence of diplomas - and further difficult economic challenges mean that it is more important than ever that we find ways of maximising the opportunities that are offered by LLNs as strategic HE-FE partnerships. Although designed with the specific needs of vocational learners in mind, most member institutions have come to recognise that this partnership-style of working is relevant to other, related, agendas.

The National Forum itself continues to support LLN practitioners through its various workstrands and other groups. You can read more about their work, and also find out how to get involved, through the Forum website.

Colleagues have also been involved in an e-systems scoping exercise, intended to ensure that we make most effective use of systems being developed across the community rather than duplicate costs and effort. The report of this study will be available shortly.

Finally, of course, we have our annual conference later this month. This year the event is taking place in York at the Royal York Hotel on 26 November. There are still places available but bookings need to be received by Tuesday 18 November.

As usual, we anticipate a good turnout with the emphasis again being on workshops and poster sessions addressing practical issues facing partnerships, and shared learning. However, we are fortunate in having two timely keynote speakers. David Eastwood, Chief Executive of HEFCE, will open the conference and Dianne Willcocks, Vice Chancellor of York St John University, will close proceedings. Their reflections - both about the future potential of LLNs and the consequences for lifelong learning of the economic downturn - promise to be highly topical. We look forward to seeing you in York.

# Brunel University Maths Café Evaluation

The Maths Café is an initiative that was implemented by Brunel University with part funding from the West London Lifelong Learning Network (WL LLN).

The project was instigated by the Maths Working Group which was formed by the WL LLN. This group sought opportunities to develop projects to improve the retention of non-traditional students.

Brunel University ran a drop-in service for two weeks over the revision period to provide tutorial assistance to any student urgently needing help as the examination period approached.

Not only was one-to-one support provided, but paper- and computer-based resources were also available.



This project ran as a pilot study to identify the main mathematical issues students needed help with and more importantly, to identify what courses these students were studying. This information will be used to design a more integrated approach to supporting students in the following and subsequent academic years.

The evaluation reports on Brunel's experiences of running the café, provides details of the students who were attracted to the café, and reports back on students' perceptions of the initiative.

**Result: 352 students accessed one-to-one support over a 2 week period.**

To read the evaluation visit: <http://www.westlondonlln.org/stem-news/546/brunel-university-maths-cafe-evaluation>

## Working with partners to develop quality and capacity in Information, Advice, Guidance and Learner Support

South West LLN

A primary focus for the South West Lifelong Learning Network has been to expand the capacity to deliver IAG and Learner Support across our very diverse geographical area that covers 4 counties. Our aim is to ensure that a wide range of people in advice roles improve their knowledge and awareness of vocational higher education. Pivotal to the achievement of this aim has been the establishment of a network of Hubs. Hubs are centres of development designed to pilot different methods of improving and delivering IAG services through partnership working. 9 hubs have been established in our 4 counties, involving 3 Adult Learning Services, a Training Provider network, 5 FE colleges, nextstep and Connexions.

Development opportunity for people involved in the wider IAG workforce has long been an area that lacks sustained investment. Currently, there is considerable activity at national level to redefine quality and training standards, with the creation of the Adult Careers and Advancement service and further changes to Connexions service for young people. Meanwhile, there is a high turnover in specialist IAG staff and much IAG is an "add-on" to the role of people such as tutors, trainers, unionlearn reps, and training brokers of various sorts. Many of the staff have themselves not undertaken any higher education and training for their IAG roles has been largely in-house. In the SWLLN area, early mapping and training needs analyses indicated that a variety of solutions were needed to meet local needs and to contribute positively to a development framework for the IAG workforce.

In the SWLLN area more than 300 people have already attended staff development sessions designed to demystify HE and introduce them to the IAG resources developed by SWLLN. In addition, training grants have been made available to individuals to obtain or improve on their existing IAG/LS skills by following an accredited course, in most cases leading to NVQ level 3 or 4 in Advice and Guidance. The take-up of this offer has been good throughout the region and people are progressing quickly through their chosen programmes. Each learner is supported by a

mentor from the SWLLN IAG/LS staff, who also ensures a focus on HE issues and reinforces the lifelong learning message.

In addition to our work with Partners in HE, FE and adult learning services, we have identified the opportunity to work with training providers. The Devon and Cornwall Training Provider Network has identified 50 IAG champions who are being trained and supported with relevant materials about supporting progression. New targets for Adult Apprenticeships and Train to Gain contracts is motivating many training providers to expand their work with over 19s; simultaneously a focus by OFSTED on exit guidance and progression is stimulating demand for quality improvement and staff development in the field of IAG. The training is provided by nextstep-sw, which helps to ensure that training provider staff have access to the wider staff development, networking and resources IAG that nextstep provides. The progression to HE dimension is provided by SWLLN staff, access to a customised resources and links to our HE-Guidance email service. Sustainability for the developments will be assured through a special area for IAG on the Network's planned Virtual Learning Environment.

Alongside training at levels 2 and 3, the SWLLN has supported the creation of a modular foundation degree in IAG at Truro College, thus providing opportunity for progression to HE for many who have achieved NVQs in Advice and Guidance and related disciplines over recent years. This Foundation Degree has attracted interest from many community-based organisations involved in Cornwall's regeneration, and aims to recruit its first learners in 2009. It is anticipated that modules from this Foundation degree, which is validated by University of Plymouth, will be run by various HE in FE providers across the South West.

For further information about anything in this article please contact Lois Thorn, IAG&LS Strand Leader, SWLLN, on 0117 9299641 email: [l.m.thorn@open.ac.uk](mailto:l.m.thorn@open.ac.uk).

# Setting the standard for using standards

West Yorkshire LLN



The Digital, ICT and Print Sector Group of the West Yorkshire LLN ([www.wylln.ac.uk](http://www.wylln.ac.uk)), led by nti Leeds ([www.ntileeds.co.uk](http://www.ntileeds.co.uk)), are embarking on an exciting new Foundation Degree proposal which has generated considerable interest from partners and professionals alike.

Working closely with e-skills UK, the sector Skills Council (SSC) for IT and Telecoms, and employers across the West Yorkshire region, Park Lane College and Leeds College of Technology have produced a curriculum development proposal for a Foundation Degree in E-Technologies which is based on the e-skills UK PROCOM standards.

e-skills PROCOM is the IT professional Competency Model built on National Occupational Standards and linked to the Skills Framework for the Information Age (SFIA). It provides an industry-recognised training framework for developing courses and qualifications that accurately meet the needs of employers in the Digital and ICT sector. PROCOM defines knowledge, understanding and competencies for seven broad disciplines (and their sub-disciplines) at five levels of progression, incorporating technical, business and personal skills.

Park Lane College has worked with nine employers, including Link Telecom, The Children's University and others to assess the SFIA and PROCOM models and their relevance to occupational roles within their own organisations. All the employers were excited at the possibility of a Degree course that was both flexible in delivery and yet included tailored content specific to the needs of employers across the ICT and Digital Media industries.

By linking the PROCOM standards to a validated HE qualification where learning outcomes are predominantly evidenced through work-related learning, facilitated through on-site visits for personal and professional development and supplemented by focused knowledge workshops and online support, this course ensures a level of personalised learning not available through traditional modes of delivery. Employer organisations and individuals undertaking the commitment to this FD will be credited for APL/APEL gained in the workplace against the Foundation Degree.

The proposal has now gained interest and support from seven partner institutions across the region - Park Lane College, Leeds College of Technology, Kirklees College (formed by the merger of Dewsbury College and Huddersfield Technical College in August 2008), Wakefield College, Joseph Priestley College, Leeds Metropolitan University and University of Huddersfield. It is also being endorsed by both e-skills UK and Foundation Degree Forward (fdf) and is an excellent example of partnership working.

# LLNs in the South East train the trainers

Four Lifelong Learning Networks in the South East are helping bridge the gap between businesses and higher education by coaching Train to Gain brokers. Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN, Kent and Medway LLN, Progress South Central and Sussex Learning Network were contracted by HESE (Higher Education South East) to deliver face-to-face training about higher education at five venues. The sessions were held at the Universities of Surrey, Sussex, Reading, Southampton Solent and Greenwich between June and October this year. Approximately fifty brokers attended in total, a number of whom were new members of staff. The training was also extended to the South East wide Corporate Broker team. Feedback following the sessions was very positive overall, with attendees rating their workshops either good or excellent.

## Some brokers' comments:

- "... incredibly valuable in extending my basic learning and knowledge."
- "I now have a better understanding of local HE specialisms."
- "Enjoyable, informative and useful session."
- "We would like the Lifelong Learning Networks to keep Train to Gain up-to-date with any changes."

The four LLNs have also developed a Brokers' Pack to complement the training, which provides quick access to a range of relevant websites and contact details for all HE providers in the South East. If you are interested in seeing the pack, it is available from the Learning Opportunities website (just navigate to the Useful resources, Resources for advisers section). The four LLNs are currently making plans about taking this work forward and continue to develop their links with Train to Gain.

## South East LLN Contacts

Hampshire and Isle of Wight LLN - Jan Wise at [jan.wise@solent.ac.uk](mailto:jan.wise@solent.ac.uk)

Progress South Central - Fay Croft at [f.croft@reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.croft@reading.ac.uk)

Sussex Learning Network - Maureen Haywood at

[M.Haywood@brighton.ac.uk](mailto:M.Haywood@brighton.ac.uk)

Kent and Medway LLN - Viki Faulkner at [v.j.faulkner@gre.ac.uk](mailto:v.j.faulkner@gre.ac.uk)

# Latest research



The Kent and Medway LLN is pleased to inform colleagues that it has recently published research findings for Kent and Medway on Employer Engagement and Work Based Learning.

Hard copies will be sent out to all LLNs shortly, but in the meantime, the executive summary and full report is available at [www.gohigher.org.uk/employer-engagement/reports](http://www.gohigher.org.uk/employer-engagement/reports)

If any further information is needed please contact Cheryl Osborn, Manager, Kent and Medway Lifelong Learning Network on [c.a.osborn@gre.ac.uk](mailto:c.a.osborn@gre.ac.uk) or 01634 883477.

# Construction Centre of Excellence

## Construction project will raise spirit levels

Yorkshire and Humber East LLN

In a first for the Humber region, construction industry employers have been consulted to decide the content of a course aimed at ending a significant skills gap, providing a much needed boost to the industry. Their recommendations formed the basis of a Foundation Degree in Construction Project Management that started at Hull College in September 2008 and is planned for Grimsby Institute in the autumn of next year.

The course has been designed to enable students to take responsibility for increasingly larger and more complex construction projects. While it is aimed at people already working in the industry, it is hoped that the course will also encourage younger learners to consider construction as a career choice.

Jointly led by Foundation Degree Forward, Yorkshire & Humber East Lifelong Learning Network (YHELLN), Hull College and Aimhigher Humber, the course has been developed through intensive consultation with construction companies, architects and large public sector organisations.

With the skills gap in the Humber region significantly higher than the national average, property development and construction companies report increasing difficulties in recruiting staff with the appropriate experience and qualifications needed to fulfil their roles.

Ross McFarlane, health, safety and training manager, at Immingham-based Promanex, said that employer involvement had led to the creation of a course that would be accepted by the industry very quickly.

"Normally, colleges and training organisations have presented us with a fait accompli, but employer involvement in the creation of this course has proved to be a hugely beneficial way of working. It has resulted in a course with content and delivery style that is much more attractive to employers to learners."

Despite the current downturn in domestic house building, research indicates that the industry in the Humber region will require around 500 new construction managers between now and 2012, and the majority of these will need to develop higher-level knowledge and skills.

Jackie McAndrew, project consultant at Aimhigher Humber, said that collaboration with key industry professionals and employers clearly identified the skills issues in the sector and construction project management emerged as a priority.

"There will be much greater opportunities for construction companies to expand and take advantage of the huge investment in Hull and the wider region with an appropriately skilled workforce," she said.

John Deverell, higher skills team leader at YHELLN, said that the two-year, part-time course was of true value and that employers could derive a direct benefit.

"The typical student would be an employee who may have on-site supervisory or project based experience, but in order for them to progress, needs to develop their knowledge and skills in areas such as managing and communicating with teams, supply chain management, contractual procedures, sustainable construction, building services engineering and IT and financial management".

One of the additional, tangible benefits of this award is that the development process that led to it can be copied by partners across the network. A new project is also underway, this time in Building Services Engineering which aims to embed the employer engagement process into colleges and at the same time develop a new award that meets the skills priorities in education and training as defined by the Sector Skills Agreement for building services.

To find out more about the project, please contact John Deverell, tel. 01482 306696.

In the photo (L to R): Paul Grayson, Brian Kerridge, Duncan Taylor, Andrew Chandler (front), David Barley, Gary Warke, Julia Billaney and Jackie McAndrew.

# The 14-19 Diploma debate - how should LLNs be involved?

Jackie Powell, IAG and Transition Co-ordinator & Rob Harrison, Director Higher Futures



It is clear LLNs vary in their opinions and approach to diplomas and not all are starting from the same place: some already have extensive involvement with their local authority and diploma consortia; some very little or none; some are very aware of the issues but others have had little time to consider them. Into this mix we have media reports suggesting the diplomas are unpopular and unlikely to succeed, alongside feedback to DCSF suggesting that learners are attracted to the qualification, but it is the parents and teachers who are concerned about acceptability for university progression, unaware of the UCAS tariff, and unaware of the number of universities making positive statements about diplomas. HEFCE policy around LLN engagement with the diploma is still evolving, so there is no clear steer, yet we would all wish to support our partners as much as possible with this important curriculum development.

Much has been learned in the course of their launch and introduction, but within such a conflicting and contradictory environment, this article argues for a measured role and response from the LLNs, and focuses on the questions that we all need to think about.

It could be argued that the diplomas are simply not in the realm and remit of LLNs, precisely because they are not 'vocational' but 'skills' based (50% theory, 50% applied learning; no work-ready learning). The decision to participate in diploma work locally requires knowledge and

understanding, and potentially a great deal of time. With seventeen 'Lines of Learning' (five already running and nine actively being planned), it seems unrealistic to get involved with all of these, and could distract from other more pressing tasks and targets, especially since many LLNs are in their final year of activity.

Perhaps most contentious is the question of 'Progression Agreements' (PAs). There are good arguments to suggest that these should not be developed at all - ironic though this may seem from an LLN perspective! - so it is worth revisiting the reasons why LLNs are developing PAs for vocational qualifications and then consider whether they are also applicable to diplomas.

The starting point was evidence of low participation in higher education by vocational learners and of differential treatment of them by universities. By contrast, the Higher Diploma has been developed with universities specifically to support progression. Despite media scepticism, 79% of universities, including Russell Group institutions, have already signalled their support for diplomas as a progression route. Diplomas have already been given a UCAS tariff, and HEIs which operate on a 'points offer' basis and are likely to extend this to diplomas automatically.

In trying to develop PAs, LLNs may be anticipating problems which may never arise, and in any case it would be wrong to pre-judge a qualification before it has even been delivered and university reaction tested. To discuss diplomas with university colleagues at the same

time as vocational qualifications suggests a similarity which isn't there, and assumes that diplomas will need special help to be accepted, possibly sowing seeds of doubt where there are none.

Without a doubt, LLNs are well placed to act as facilitators between a range of potential stakeholders. FECs involved in diploma delivery and HEIs who may want to make links with curriculum delivery teams in schools and colleges or be involved in the 'Extended project'. Local authorities looking for successful implementation. Brokering useful employer and training provider links, particularly where diploma delivery may require access to specialised equipment or facilities.

We understand and accept that there are other views, equally valid, that counterbalance the position outlined here, and a case could be made for the close involvement of LLNs in all aspects of diplomas and indeed other 14-19 work. It may be that over the coming months there will be a clearer role defined for LLNs in relation to this agenda. However, we would suggest that a measured approach is best for now. We believe it is worth watching and waiting, before leaping in to act too quickly, particularly when some actions may have unintended consequences.

This is an abridged version of a longer discussion piece prepared by Higher Futures. To read the full text of this article, and hear other views visit the '14-19' section of the National Forum website.



## Productive Working - Built Environment

Earlier this year, a joint workshop was held at Derby University for Construction and the Built Environment colleagues. The session was developed by the National LLN Construction & Built Environment workstrand group, ConstructionSkills, the Sector Skills Council, and the Centre for Education in the Built Environment (CEBE), the Higher Education Academy Subject Centre.

This event grew out of the relationship between a project developing ConstructionSkills' strategy towards Higher Education, and the national LLN sector group for Construction and Built Environment. The workshop was central to the Group's liaison with ConstructionSkills to help implement policy and shape future ideas. CEBE was involved because of their leading edge employer engagement work, including that supported by the HEFCE funded North West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder. Such connections fitted with setting out progress since 2005 when the ConstructionSkills Sector Skills Agreement for England stated that:

'...HEFCE funded Lifelong Learning Networks... with a significant construction and built environment emphasis should be informed by a national framework or 'roadmap' of higher education programmes and routes to professional qualifications'.

Overall, the workshop offered sight of this emerging 'roadmap' and was developed by Kath Galloway, consultant for ConstructionSkills, Dave Tooth, Leap Ahead LLN in Derby and Aled Williams, Deputy Director CEBE. Hazel Palmer of CEBE gave much appreciated organisational support. About 40 colleagues attended including from the National LLN Construction & Built Environment Group, ConstructionSkills, other Built Environment SSCs, and the Collaborative Higher Education Alliance project operating in the East Midlands.

**The workshop featured 5 sessions, with leads as shown:**

**Progress through Partnership:** Aled Williams, CEBE, covering the characteristics of genuine partnership between HEIs and employers, including employer demand leading, language for understanding, the right channels, managing the relationship, Professional Bodies, and minimising risk to HEIs.

**Competence to Capability:** Tim Lees, CEBE, where 3 questions were asked; does mapping to National Occupational

Standards/professional competencies represent a 'quick fix' to being demand led; what are the issues in developing 'joint provision'; how can mapping enhance provision?

**A single portal:** Debbie Hatton, ConstructionSkills, National Skills Academy for Construction (NSAFC) and Patrick Barber of Leap Ahead LLN. The focus was on regional groupings that can help LLNs meet employer needs more effectively. NSAFC was highlighted because there are opportunities for LLNs to engage as national coverage of this flagship initiative is developing.

**Demand led CPD:** Fiona Stanier, North West Higher Level Skills Pathfinder, and Brian Cairns, MOVE LLN. Brian outlined MOVE's work with Professional Institutions on a regional CPD framework for the industry. This aims to enable (mainly) graduates to gain Chartered Status by accessing modules from several universities.

**A-Z for Lifelong Learning Networks and Sector Skills**

**Council staff:** Steve Housden and Amanda Sergeant, Regional Strategy Advisers for ConstructionSkills. Based on what has happened in the Yorkshire and Humber region (according to Government Office divisions), this session covered changes to regional groupings stemming from the Leitch Review of Skills, which will affect how LLNs might operate with employers via SSCs.

**Q&A Session**

The panel was John Short and Brian Cairns from the National LLN Construction & Built Environment Group, and David Cracknell, Director of Lifelong Learning, Construction Industry Council (CIC) as a partner in ConstructionSkills. Topics were Progression from Advanced Apprenticeships to HE, the HEFCE funded pathfinder on 14-19 Diplomas, and Technical Apprenticeships. Numerous questions were taken; colleagues had a lively debate on issues surrounding these areas.

What was initiated at this workshop must be continued and retain its clear focus, so next steps will be discussed at the National LLN Construction & Built Environment Group meeting in September.

For more information and to find out what has happened since this event, contact John Short on 02746 792 292 or email [john.short@coventry.ac.uk](mailto:john.short@coventry.ac.uk)

# Groundbreaking Foundation Degree to meet the needs of small and medium care home employers in Suffolk and Norfolk

Ann Jackson Fowler, MOVE

This development is one of the Skills for Health national demonstration pilot sites and was brought about through a partnership between Skills for Health, Skills for Care, Fdf, University Campus Suffolk, the East of England Strategic Health Authority and MOVE Lifelong Learning Network for the East of England. The demand for programme development was in response to the challenge of finding innovative solutions to develop higher level skills within care homes to meet the increased healthcare needs of a rising elderly population in Norfolk and Suffolk care homes.

The drivers for an education programme included the challenge facing both the NHS and the independent healthcare sector in needing to increase their capacity and capability to accommodate rising service-demand from an expanding elderly population with long-term healthcare needs, combined with growing pressure on community nursing services resulting in lengthening patient waiting times for patients in care homes requiring routine clinical care.

There were also staff development and career opportunities to address. Care homes need to provide opportunities for staff to expand and advance their skills in order to recruit and retain the volume of employees required to meet future demand. Therefore, the programme needed to be either fully work-based or take the form of blended learning to reduce time spent out of the workplace and overcome travel issues experienced in remote parts of Norfolk and Suffolk. The programme would also need to be transferable and have recognised credit accumulation

The result is a new Foundation Degree in Continuing Care, validated on 9 June 2008 delivered by University Campus Suffolk for care staff that offers a blend of work based and theoretical learning and provides credit accumulation and transfer value to facilitate progression.

The new programme will give progression routes for staff leading to enhanced roles which will help improve staff retention and give a better experience for patients. Staff completing the programme will have enhanced skills and competencies which will enable greater efficiency and potential savings within homes and for the wider health sector with a more flexible workforce appropriately educated and equipped to ease the burden on community nursing services and provide a cost reduction to health commissioners with the added benefit of reducing the number of hospital admissions.

Student recruitment is underway with the first cohort starting in the New Year. With nationwide demand for this type of education expected to spiral, Skills for Health will be making the Foundation Degree content available to interested universities throughout the UK for them to customise to meet local employer needs and local university approval arrangements.

## Forthcoming LLN Events

### 26 November 08

#### **The 3rd Annual National LLN Conference**

The deadline for conference bookings is 18 November. For further details and booking forms please visit the website.

### 9 December 08

#### **LLN workstrand meeting: Marketing**

### 10 December 08

#### **LLN workstrand meeting: Construction & the Built Environment**

### 30 January 09

#### **LLN Workstrand event: Building a future in Construction and Engineering**

For further workstrand meeting dates please keep checking the website.

### Work with UnionLearn

We know that many of you are working closely with Unionlearn. For those that are not, we thought it might be useful to share contact details with you. For a list of regional contacts please see <http://www.lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk/documents/document373.doc>

### Thanks for reading

**We hope to publish the next edition in February 2009 and ask that all contributions are sent in to [contactus@lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk](mailto:contactus@lifelonglearningnetworks.org.uk) by 30 January 2009.**